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BEYOND BEIRUT

Israeli Journalists
Dialogues with Arafat,
July/August 1982

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We believe that peace, security and justice are possible in the Middle East. The area of the world from which the religious prophetic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have come may rediscover the faithfulness of these traditions to justice and peace. If war continues in the area, it will be because the contenders and the rest of us do not truly believe that peace is possible. If peace comes it will be because one or more of these countries and people involved will have believed, and, believing, will have acted daringly and faithfully in that belief.

URI AVNERY

A MEETING WITH ARAFAT

copyright Uri Avnery

This interview took place in west Beirut on Saturday, July 3, 1982. Uri Avnery crossed the frontline of the besieged city after prior arrangement, accompanied by two members of the editorial staff of "Haolam Hazei," the Israeli newsmagazine of which he is the editor-in-chief. They were correspondent Sarit Yishai and photographer Anat Saragusti. The three Israelis were conducted to a private apartment, where Mr. Arafat joined them. It was the first time ever that Mr. Arafat received Israelis. Mr. Avnery is the chairman of the Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, and also the chairman of the Executive of the Sheli peace party. In the interview, which was arranged with the help of Dr. Issam Sartawi, and which lasted for more than two hours, several other members of Mr. Arafat's staff took part, including Mr. Amad Shakur, spokesman Mahmud Labadi, Mr. Ghazi Khouri, the poet Mahmud Darwish and the PLO diplomat, Shafik Al-Hut. The conversation took place in English and was recorded by Mr. Avnery.

The transcript is as follows:

Avnery: I am happy to be received by you after so many years. I regret that it is under these circumstances.

Arafat: I am also glad to meet you personally. I have been reading your articles since 1967.

Avnery: In our Arabic edition?

Arafat: Yes, the Arabic edition.

Avnery: He (Amad Shakur) was once working on the staff of that edition.

Arafat: (laughs) Really?

Avnery: And I know Ghazi (Khouri) for 5, 6 years, when he was the assistant of Dr. Issam Sartawi.

Khouri: Seven years.

Avnery: Seven years already! In the beginning I used to talk with Said Hamami [PLO representative in London, murdered in 1978 by Iraqi agents, who established the first contact with Mr. Avnery in 1974].

Arafat: Please greet all our friends, (General) Matti Peled and the others.

Avnery: They are all fighting, all fighting against this war.

Arafat: Give my best wishes to them, please. We are following their actions, their steps, the reports, and I am very grateful to them, for what they are doing.

Avnery: They are doing it for our own people as much as for your people.

Arafat: I am sorry that this Israeli military junta does not want to understand what is going to happen. In my opinion they are very stupid. You can't control another people by power. I'll give you examples from all over the world. Where is Hitler, with all his power? Where is Attila, with all his power? Maybe you can control by power for a certain, for a very short certain time. So what?

Avnery: The trouble is that some of our people have become intoxicated by power, because the Jewish people did not have power for so long, that once they got power they became intoxicated by it and think they can solve things by this power.

Arafat: It is the arrogance of power, but it means nothing.

Avnery: If you were addressing today the mass demonstration of the Peace Movement in Tel Aviv [in which a hundred thousand people took part. The demonstration took place a few hours after the meeting with Arafat]—the people there are dedicated to peace and against the war—what would you tell them?

Arafat: We are human beings. And we have the right

to live.

Avnery: That is putting it very briefly. What do you think they should do?

Arafat: To see that the United Nations resolutions will be implemented: We are not asking for the moon!

Avnery: You see, the real question, the real problem we are facing in Israel, is that it's very difficult to convince the Israeli people that if a Palestinian state will come into being in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with its capital in East Jerusalem, that this will be the real solution, not just a solution for...

Arafat: For me the United Nations resolutions are the guidance.

Avnery: 242?

Arafat: No, 242 has been rejected by our [national] council.

Avnery: Because it did not mention the Palestinians?

Arafat: Because it completely neglected the Palestinian cause, the Palestinian people. It is a resolution which has been adopted after the 1967 war against the Arab armies, and although the Palestinian cause was and still is the crux of the whole Middle Eastern crisis, they neglected this crux of the whole issue. And here we are. It is the truth. And here we are. three divisions are blockading Beirut, threatening to invade, besides the navy, besides the airforce. but tell me, can they solve the issue with this huge power? Let them try!

Avnery: So when you say the United Nations resolution, you mean all the UN resolutions?

Arafat: Yes, we have to look for all the resolutions. You know, Israel is the only state which has been created according to one of the United Nations resolutions, and I am sorry to say that it is the only state that does not respect any of the United Nations resolutions. I will give you a shameful example: you remember that the invasion here in Lebanon has been done through the United Nations troupes, in the south, without respecting at all this flag, this international flag. There was [in Arabic] Thawato.

Khoury: Conspiracy [members of Mr. Arafat's entourage translate the Arabic into Hebrew].

Arafat: Some of the leaders and officers of the United Nations forces [conspired with the Israelis], and they crossed through the UNIFIL forces. So the Israelis do not respect the United Nations forces, the United Nations flag, the United Nations resolutions. For how long? I ask, I am addressing this to all Israelis: How long will you be able to act with this arrogance? For how long? Ten years? Twenty years? Fifty years? O.K., we can take it. We have the ability to bear it and to survive. But the results will be a disaster. Not for us. This is very important. I am a man [conscious] of history. I see it, I can see it, faintly but very clearly. So it's very important for everyone of us to think deeply of the future!

Arafat: It seems not, because the majority has not had the ability, until now, to unmask the whole story.

Avnery: If I may say why I think this happened, it is because the great majority of Israelis, who I think are basically peaceloving people have become convinced by our official propaganda that the PLO does not really want peace.

Arafat: The PLO?

Avnery: How to convince...

Arafat: The PLO? You know it is not so! We have declared our approval for the American-Soviet communique of [October] 1977. We have declared our approval! [This communique provided a basis for a solution safeguarding the existence of Israel and the rights of the Palestinians. It was revoked by the Carter administration after a visit by Moshe Dayan to Washington.] We have also declared our approval and appreciation of President Brezhnev's initiative [of last year].

Avnery: Which says that the security of all states in the area, including Israel, which it explicitly mentions, will be safeguarded.

Arafat: You see, when we have said okay to this initiative, this means that we accepted at all its parts. We said that it is a good platform for a peaceful settlement, for a just settlement, for a peaceful solution in the Middle East. And you remember that I myself have declared that the Fahd proposals are a very good platform for a solution in the Middle East. So we gave many signals that we are looking for peace. But I am sorry to say that this military Israeli junta are acting in this arrogant way. I am sorry they can't see the lessons of history. It seems that we are not learning enough from history.

Avnery: Very few people are able to learn from history.

Arafat: But I am not worried at all.

Yishai: If the Israeli people do not believe that the Palestinians want peace, it is for two reasons. First, you have in the Palestinian Covenant this paragraph which says that there is no such thing as Jewish nation, that there is no Jewish people...

Arafat: No! I am sorry, but this is not so! I know exactly our covenant, our constitution, and there is nothing there concerning this. We didn't say anything concerning the Jews at all!

Avnery: Every Israeli believes.

Yishai: Doesn't it say...

Arafat: No, no, no! I have to remind you that our famous resolution, which was adopted at the 15th—or 13th—session of our Palestinian National Council, says that we have to start a dialogue with all democratic, progressive forces in Israel. What is this for?

Avnery: The trouble, Mr. Chairman, is that there were in this resolution a few additional words about Zionism, which were very disturbing to many Israelis. The Israelis are all Zionists, they consider themselves Zionists, even if they don't know exactly what it is and what it means and this emphasis on... We don't ask you to be a Zionist, or Chazi to be a Zionist, but ordinary Israelis are Zionists.

Arafat: For me it is something else. I don't accept all

your theories...

Avnery: You don't have to.

Arafat: You see, you have your own theories, or some of the Israelis have their own theories, but we have to speak also frankly. Not all the Jews are Zionists. I will give you an example. His excellency, Mr. Kreisky, said that he is not a Zionist. He is a Jew, and we respect him. We have a very good relationship with him.

Avnery: But in Israel...

Arafat: You can't expect me to accept Zionist theories.

Avnery: Certainly not, but...

Arafat: At least from the point of view of religion, I can't accept it. Judaism is a part of our tradition. You can't say I am anti-semitic. So Judaism is a part of our tradition, Islam is a part of our tradition and Christianity is a part of our tradition.

Yishai: Unfortunately, Israelis believe that some Palestinian said "we want to throw the Jews into the sea."

Arafat: No!!! Who said it?

Yishai: This is what Israelis believe.

Arafat: No! Who said it? Who said it? It is one of the big lies, a very big lie! Nobody, no Palestinian, has said it, this big lie! Tell me, who said it? This Israeli junta is repeating this, this big lie. Give me one proof that this has been said by a Palestinian!

Avnery: May Shukeiry at some time.

Arafat: No, no, we have checked the story! It is one of the biggest lies!

Yishai: You were aware of this lie? You were aware that there is such a story circulating in Israel?

Arafat: I know that they are using this lie to push...

Shakur: Now I remember that once, before the 1956 war, I had an argument about this with Prof. Shlomo Avnery [of the Hebrew University] and I proved to him that it was a lie. I was a student then. I proved to him that no-one ever said it. Since then he stopped mentioning it. And suppose that somebody said it, so what?

Khour: But actually and truly no-one has ever said it.

Avnery: You see the greatest damage, as far as our people:...

Arafat: You mean that they [the Israeli army] are here because of this big lie?

Avnery: Yes!

Yishai: Yes!

Avnery: Exactly!

Arafat: At the battle front...

Avnery: I would put it this way, they would not be able to be here, if the mass of the Israeli people would not believe this. The soldiers who are fighting. Arik Sharon has his own ideas, a very clearcut idea of what he wants to do. Arik Sharon wants to annex the West Bank to Israel. In order to make this possible, he wants to destroy the PLO.

Arafat: Sharon [in Arabic] is a merchant of blood, a speculator of blood.

Avnery: But he would not be able to do it, and the soldiers would not follow him, if they did not really believe that the PLO wants to destroy the state of Israel.

Arafat: You don't want to tell me that this very intelligent, and this very clever people, the Jewish people, can believe these big lies!

Avnery: They believe it.

Yishai: Simple people believe it.

Arafat: You see, this is very important. You are not from the third world...

Yishai: We have many Jews from the third world.

Avnery: Half of the Jews in Israel are from the third world.

Arafat: But they are in Israel for 33 years! Definitely you are not...

Yishai: It is a fact that the Jews who came from the Arab world hate the Arabs more than others.

Arafat: I don't understand the dilemma.

Avnery: By the way, Anat [Saragusti] is from a Moroccan family, and Sarit [Yishai] is from a Sephardi family from Yugoslavia. They are both Sephardis. I am

Ashkenazi.

Yishai: But my family has been living for generations in this country. I am a Palestinian.

Shakur: We are all Palestinians.

Arafat: Yes, we are all Palestinians.

Shakur: And Sharon is fighting against all of us.

Avnery: I was waiting for this meeting with you for many years, for this is exactly what we wanted to tell you: That the real problem is that a great number of Israelis really believe these stories about the Palestinians never being ready to recognize the state of Israel, even in the context of peace based on the co-existence of the state of Israel and a state of Palestine. This is one thing which has to be made clear, in a way that any man in the street can understand: that what we want is a peace solution based on mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual recognition.

Arafat: Let's leave this political dilemma for a moment. What about the people? What about the Palestinian people? I have to ask you: What about the Palestinian people who are living in this area? I have to ask every Jewish person, not only Israelis, all over the world, every Jew, what about the Palestinian people? What about these four million Palestinians?

Avnery: They must go back to Palestine, to the Palestinian State.

Arafat: What about their future? To be refugees? And now Sharon is dictating to this area and insists that we have to leave. Where to? To Crete? Where to? Where have I to live? To Crete? To Cyprus? Where to? I am a human being. And our children have a right to live also. Very simple. But it seems that this Israeli military junta insists on not seeing the realities, the facts and the future.

Avnery: I believe...

Arafat: I am not worried. I am not worried at all about the future. In spite of all this big invasion. It is a big American/Israeli parade, eight divisions. It is a shame for the Israeli army. Even from the tactical military

point of view, it is a shame. I am not going to speak about the massacre, the genocide that has been done against the Palestinians in the south, in Rasidieh, in Burj-el Shemali, in Ein-el Hilweh. I hope that you will have the opportunity to go there. Every Israeli must go there and see by himself this shameful, this dirty work.

Avnery: I was in Saida [Sidon].

Arafat: It is very important, I am asking everybody all over the world to come and see this superpower, this huge power, the Israeli army, what they have done against the Palestinians, against our refugees, against our children, against our women. Do they think that they can solve the problem by this genocide? Okay, they can kill half a million of the Palestinians here, but there are still three and half million of us. This is definitely shameful. Okay, if this is the way. History is not only battles.

Shakur: Chairman Arafat has already denied that anyone has ever said that he wants to send the Jews into the sea. But what is general Sharon doing here? he is sending us to graves in the desert.

Arafat: Not into the desert.

Shakur: To graves in the desert.

Arafat: No, now he is throwing us into the sea, into the graves in the sea. He is doing it. He is doing it in a very dramatic, spectacular way. With the TV around him.

Labadi: I want to ask you a question: just this meeting between Chairman Arafat and you, doesn't it mean that he accepts the idea that we can live together with the Jews?

Arafat: [crying out] Yes, we have declared it in our constitution, in our resolutions, that we want to live with all the Jews. We are not against the Jews. We said it.

Labadi: Yesterday there was a meeting of the peace forces in Brussels, and an Israeli made a speech there.

Avnery: As I told already Chairman Arafat, today there is a big mass demonstration against the war in Tel Aviv. People in Israel are not for the war. The situation

in Israel today is like this, and has been so for a long time: you have a minority in Israel which would support Begin and Sharon always. They want to destroy the national identity of the Palestinian people and to annex the west Bank. but this is a minority. On the other side there is a minority which is against the war and understands the Palestinian problem. In the middle you have the great mass of the people who can be influenced this way or that way, and our job is to influence them in the direction of peace.

Arafat: The Jews are a religious people, they used to follow their religion. This Israeli military junta are spoiling all the features of life, but they are also spoiling, in a very shameful way, the spirit of Judaism.

Avnery: One has to make the people on both sides want to live in peace and believe that peace is possible. the great challenge is to make the people believe that peace is possible, despite the war which has been going on for a hundred years between the Palestinians and the Israelis, that peace is possible. This is the one important thing. If the mass of the Israeli people would believe this...

Arafat: Not through the guns.

Avnery: Not through the guns.

Arafat: Not through the barrels of the guns and the tanks. You see, if it is through the barrels of the guns, the tanks, sooner or later we will find a way to overcome the guns and the tanks. and here we are. You know this is the longest Israeli-Arab war.

Avnery: Yes, this is the longest.

Arafat: The longest war. I am challenging him [Sharon] as a general, or his generals, to declare the exact number of the casualties. From our side I have declared it, we have thirty thousand killed and wounded.

Yishai: How many killed?

Arafat: Ten thousand or eleven thousand killed, about eighteen, nineteen thousand wounded, thirty thousand Arabs killed or wounded.

Avnery: How many Palestinian fighting men have been

killed?

Arafat: We are not announcing this. During the war I am not declaring casualties. The war is still going on. But you see, ten thousand still missing. Hundreds of thousands of refugees, Palestinians and Lebanese, women and children.

Labadi: For the third time.

Arafat: For the third time, some of the Lebanese for the fifth time. From the south to the north, from the north to the south.

Yishai: I would like to know if it is possible, and I hope so: do you have only one Israeli prisoner?

Shakur: There is only one prisoner of war, the pilot.

Yishai: And there are no more?

Arafat: No, I have to tell you.

Shakur: In Beirut we have only one.

Yishai: Because there are some missing.

Shakur: We have some dead bodies. Two or three.

Arafat: Four bodies.

Shakur: No, there are four bodies from the previous war.

Arafat: And they are the bodies of the two captains.

Yishai: From this war?

Arafat: Yes, from the helicopter, from the second day of the war.

Yishai: Maybe I shouldn't ask, but you are a very nice person: can we have the names of the soldiers whose bodies you have?

Arafat: Yes, yes, we have them, we can give them to you. Do you want to see the pilot [who was taken prisoner]?

Avnery: We would very much like to!

Arafat: Yes, yes, I can arrange for you to see him. You can ask him how we treat him. Ask him, not us! yesterday a leaflet has been thrown from Israeli airplanes, by the Israeli army, and it says: we know that you have prisoners...

Shakur: [explains in Hebrew] The leaflet says: we know that you have prisoners and we warn you to tell us where they are, otherwise we shall do so and so and so.

Arafat: I would like to have more time with you but I am sorry that just when you were coming here, I was supposed to meet the [Lebanese] prime-minister.

Avnery: Mr. Arafat, if the Israeli government would come today and say: okay, we had a war, you have fought very bravely, our people have fought very bravely...

Arafat: Definitely fought bravely, we know that.

Avnery: Let's make peace now, based on mutual respect of the people who have been fighting, you shall have a Palestinian state, we have the state of Israel, we shall live peacefully together. What would you say?

Arafat: You see, we have given a positive answer but nobody had offered it to us. You know that.

Avnery: I know, but I want Israeli people to know.

Arafat: Because we want to live and let others live.

Avnery: [after a German TV team has been allowed to enter] I would like to have a copy of this film. It is very important at this moment for the Israeli public to see this unbelievable thing happening.

Yishai: I believe I am dreaming.

Arafat: [laughs]

Labadi: I was in Berlin in 1970 when I was still a student, I heard there a lecture by Mr. Avnery about his book, in which he proposed a federation of Semitic peoples, a Semitic union [explains the idea in Arabic to Mr. Arafat].

Arafat: Inshallah! [If God so wills!]

Shakur: I have got the book here.

Avnery: You see, I believe that in the end, after everything is finished, there should be an Israeli State, and a Palestinian State, with its capital in east Jerusalem, and there should be a general regional organization unifying all the Arab states and Israeli in one economic and political union.

Arafat: Abba Eban proposed a "benelux." Yes. [meaning a union of three states: Israel, Palestine and Jordan.]

Avnery: If the Labor party had been more courageous,

the whole situation today would be different. The people in the street today are more courageous than the Labor party.

Arafat: This morning I read an article by Zeev Shiff [a well-known Israeli military commentator]. He gave a very good analysis of this war.

Yishai: Did you read it in Hebrew?

Arafat: No, in translation.

Yishai: Do you know any words in Hebrew?

Arafat: Yes, [in Hebrew] how are you? I love you! [general laughter]

Darwish: [in Hebrew to Sarit Yishai] You have got a good chance. He is a bachelor.

Avnery: That would be a solution. Yasser Arafat would marry an Israeli girl. This would solve the whole problem.

Arafat: No! [laughter] But if this is the solution, okay, I would do it today.

Yishai: But today is Ramadan. [Addressing Arafat's assistants] Would you like him to marry?

Darwish: Yes, oh yes.

Yishai: Why?

Darwish: Because we would have more time to work [general laughter].

Avnery: Mr. Arafat, what are the chances for a political solution of the present problem in Beirut?

Arafat: For the sake of the six hundred thousand Lebanese people who are here in West Beirut, and the two hundred thousand Palestinians, together about eight hundred thousand people, we look for a political solution. We are negotiating with the Lebanese authorities to find a solution. This has been discussed also in this committee [the inter-Arab meeting which took place on the previous day in Taif, Saudi Arabia, with the participation of Mr. Bashir Gemayel].

Avnery: If there is a chance for an honorable move from here, where do you think it is possible [to go]?

Arafat: To Palestine.

Avnery: I mean tomorrow, not next year.

Arafat: To Palestine. It is my right. You go there?

Avnery: Today.

Arafat: You think that you have the right to go there, and I have no right to come back? Where to go? I am a human being too! Where to except my homeland? I want to go to my homeland!

Yishai: When you say Palestine, what do you mean by Palestine?

Arafat: For all of us? All Palestine! For you and for us!

Yishai: Together, you mean?

Arafat: Together. Why not?

Yishai: You don't mean a separate state [for the Palestinians]?

Arafat: You know our famous slogan: a democratic, secular state. And if not, if this is not the solution, then two separate states.

Saragusti: What kind of government?

Arafat: You know that we have a democratic constitution. At least it is better than yours. About that there is no doubt. At least we don't have these forms of military arrogance among us.

Yishai: When you say that it won't be possible for us to live in one state, and you are talking about two states—about what part of Palestine you are talking?

Arafat: You see, as I have mentioned, we have offered—we, the victims—have offered two solutions. Officially and openly. Sixty percent of my people are refugees, homeless, stateless, and we have offered two solutions. The first solution, which we offered in 1969: we said: let us, all of us, live in this democratic state, where Jews, Christians and Muslims can live on an equal footing. This has been rejected. In 1974 our Palestinian National Council has offered another solution: Okay, we are ready to live in any part in Palestine from which the Israelis withdraw or which will be liberated. Any part.

Avnery: In practice this means the West Bank and the

Gaza Strip.

Arafat: Any part. I am giving you the accurate thesis, the exact words which have been used in our resolution, and don't forget: I have been elected on the basis of this political platform. So we have declared, and our Palestinian National Council have accepted, these two solutions. But the other side, what have they offered us? [At this point the German TV team started to film.]

Arafat: By this war they have already shaken the volcanos in this area, very deep, and this is a fatal mistake, their fatal mistake. Till now the battle is going on, maybe we shall reach a compromise, maybe not. But this is not important. The most important historical fact is that they shook the volcanos, they are shaking the volcanos, they are very narrow minded, very narrow minded. [Here the recording stopped. From here on Arafat spoke for the German TV program, repeating some points which he had made previously.]



Arafat

After Beirut, What?

'The Question Today Is . . . Our Right to Exist'

On Aug. 9, PLO leader Yasser Arafat was interviewed by Ammon Kapeliouk, an Israeli writer, for the French newspaper Le Monde. The text is reprinted here with permission.

Q. Has the moment of truth arrived? A decisive battle with all its consequences, or a retreat from Beirut: how do you see the future of the PLO and the Palestinian people?

A. We have arrived at a final accord with the Lebanese government and with the American envoy Philip Habib on the departure of our forces to several Arab countries, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Egypt, which have agreed to receive them. We do not exclude the worst: [Menachem] Begin and [Ariel] Sharon could try to surprise us. I have let them know that we have learned the lessons of Masada and of the Warsaw Ghetto, and that we are ready to sacrifice ourselves if necessary. I do not fear death; it is my adversaries who must fear the consequences. History cannot be stopped. The war has demonstrated that the Palestinians fight with courage and honor to attain their just purpose.

Q. But where will you go?

A. We have forces in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and Algeria. The headquarters of the PLO was in Cairo until [Anwar] Sadat's visit to Jerusalem. It was

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subsequently transferred to Damascus, where I continue to maintain my official office.

Q. Does the passive attitude of the Arab world surprise you?

A. Absolutely not. I've expected nothing else since the collapse of the Fez conference. Several Arab countries have offered to receive our forces, but that is merely temporary. Where do we go afterward? The whole world ought to consider that problem at an international conference of all the countries involved, including the great powers, after the end of this war.

Q. You have made overtures in the direction of the United States without getting anything. Were you disappointed?

A. The United States is a great power, and we shall continue to try to influence American opinion. The United States will soon understand that it cannot ignore the will of 4½ million Palestinians.

Q. Many Israelis are asking themselves if the time has not come for a historical reconciliation between the Jewish nation of Israel and the Palestinian Arab people, the latter having accepted a "peace of the brave" similar to that of which Gen. de Gaulle spoke in regard to Algeria.

A. In the Israeli military establishment, is there a personality similar to that of de Gaulle's? I strongly doubt it. That said, our national council adopted several resolutions on the opening of a debate with the democratic forces in Israel, and we are ready to establish relations with all those who recognize our right to self-determination.

Q. The Israelis are waiting for your official recognition. Are you ready to grant it to them?

A. Begin and Sharon have repeatedly affirmed that they don't need our recognition. They said that, even if we recognize Israel, they will never have anything to do with us. They treat us like Nazis, to a point that their actions in Lebanon in the camps of Beirut recall the behavior of the Nazis. I repeat what I said to [Rep.

Pete] McCloskey: we accept all of the U.N. resolutions concerning the Palestinian question. We do not forget that Israel was created by a U.N. resolution. Israel, moreover, has everything; we have nothing, and yet it is we who are asked to recognize Israel, which for its part refuses categorically to recognize our right to self-determination. Whatever I have to say regarding recognition, I shall not say it under coercion, with Sharon's tanks surrounding us: I repeat: the question today is, more than ever, our right to exist and self-determination.

Q: Do you include the U.N. Security Council's Resolution 242 among those which you have accepted?

A: You undoubtedly know that this resolution considers our problem to be solely a problem of refugees. In 1977, the Carter administration proposed that we should accept this resolution while taking account of our reservations. We had accepted this proposition under three conditions: the opening of a dialogue between the United Nations and the PLO; the recognition of the rights of Palestinians to self-determination; the creation of an independent Palestinian state. It's hardly necessary to say that the dialogue broke down. Since then, our national council has adopted several statements about this resolution. Moreover, since when has Begin become the big defender of Resolution 242? Let's not forget that in August 1970, he left the Government of National Union to protest against [Golda] Meir's acceptance of Resolution 242, which, according to him, implied the withdrawal from all occupied territories.

Q: Certain Israelis affirm that you wouldn't be satisfied with a state in Jordan and the Gaza, and in such a case, you would constitute a menace to Israel?

A: Ridiculous! I do not understand these statements. Israel is the strongest military power in the Middle East. Can one be afraid of a Palestinian state that will need more than 20 years to be able to stand on its own feet? The Israeli military establishment believes that it will be

able to rule the region, thanks to its technology and to American dollars. But how long? It will be necessary to search for coexistence with countries in the region and not imagine artificial problems. It is the Israelis who must find some solutions to the Palestinian tragedy, which they created.

Q: Your national charter gives ammunition to your political adversaries. Israeli children in school learn the words of this charter, which denies the right of Israel to exist, which does not recognize the Jews as a nation, and which affirms that armed struggle is the only way to have a state.

A: We have already affirmed several times through our national council, that the armed struggle no longer constituted the only way. Many things have been said about this charter, and people have tried to interpret it in a tendentious manner. To put an end to these ambiguities, I propose today that we organize a conference after this war, bringing together Palestinian, Israeli and Arab thinkers to go to the bottom of all of the problems and to arrive at some conclusions. This conference could eventually be held somewhere in Europe under the aegis of an organization or a political party that would be chosen by mutual agreement. Among the Palestinians, there exists a clear evolution of understanding of the unexpected changes that occurred during the course of these past years. We are not frozen in these unalterable positions: it's Begin who is completely unyielding.

Q: Are you under the impression of having committed errors during this whole conflict?

A: Yes. We haven't been able to explain our cause to the Israelis; we haven't understood the Israeli mentality. Moreover, we don't have the means in the field of information to transmit our ideas to the Israeli people.

Q: And the [military] operations directed against the Israeli civilians?

A: I have always been politically and ideologically against those types of operations. While I understand

the motivations of certain Palestinians, who have lost hope and resort to those methods, I have always been opposed. I'm telling you this in my capacity as president of the PLO, as much as chief of the Palestinian revolution. In fact, it is necessary to specify that, in certain cases, such as Munich, Maslot, and the Savoy [a hotel in Tel Aviv], the death of innocents could have been avoided if the Israelis had not opened fire. What Begin and Sharon did during the Lebanese war—the indiscriminate bombing of Beirut, which last week caused some 500 civilian deaths—will leave an indelible stain on the brow of the Israeli leaders.

Q: Have you appraised the attitude of the inhabitants of the territories occupied during the course of this war?

A: The Palestinians of the interior, from Bassam Chakaa to Karim Khalif, including Elias Freij and Rachada Chawa [respectively, mayors of Naplouse, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Gaza] and several others, demonstrated their devotion to the cause of our people in these difficult conditions.

Q: Finally, what do you have to say to the Israelis?

A: I find myself surrounded here, and I'm addressing myself to Israeli soldiers, as well as to the common citizens. And I'm telling them: stop—military arrogance will not shatter us. I would like to say a word to Col. Eli Geva, that in spite of our differences, I appreciate his humanitarian position and his decision to refuse to participate in the assault of Beirut. His noble attitude is derived from true Jewish values. Peace will reign in the Holy Land, despite the arrogance of those leaders for whom brutal force is the only maxim in the life of nations. I invite the militants of the "Peace Now" movement, of New Outlook, and all those who recognize our rights to self-determination to come to Beirut to see the destruction and the suffering of the people. A day will come when the Israelis will be ashamed and will want to forget what their present leaders did to the Palestinian people in Lebanon during the summer of 1982.

We welcome your questions and participation.
Please contact your nearest AFSC office.

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